



Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc.

## TESTIMONY HIGHLIGHTING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF HELP ME GROW TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT

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My name is Lisa Honigfeld, and I am vice president for health initiatives at the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). Our mission is to promote primary and preventive health and mental health care for all children in Connecticut, with a particular focus on the underserved. Our board members include key state leaders in health care and members of the academic, education, and business communities who are committed to improving developmental outcomes for children in Connecticut. In this testimony, I highlight the valuable contribution that Help Me Grow and its central portal of entry, United Way 211 Child Development Infoline (CDI) make to Connecticut's early childhood system.

Early detection of developmental and behavioral health concerns and connection to follow-up services is key to ensuring best outcomes for children. Connecticut has long benefited from excellent early childhood programs, including: Birth to Three services provided to more than 9,000 children annually, preschool special education services provided by local school districts, maternal and child health block grant services, and several other programs ranging from home visiting to family centers.

**Help Me Grow is the lynchpin connecting early detection of children at risk of delays to all of these programs. Help Me Grow partners with providers and childhood initiatives to ensure that young children and their families are connected to the right service from the impressive array of early childhood opportunities.** With four main components, Help Me Grow, in partnership with the United Way's 211 Child Development Infoline (CDI), coordinates the work of several early childhood providers and helps families navigate the continuum of early childhood opportunities in their communities. The four components include:

1. Help Me Grow **physician outreach** trains child health providers in developmental surveillance and screening and connection of children for whom there are concerns to the appropriate follow-up services. More than 230 child health provider sites have been trained, and as a result, screening of young children for developmental delays in Connecticut has increased from fewer than 2,000 screens in 2007 to more than 45,000 in 2015.
2. Through networking breakfasts in communities across Connecticut, Help Me Grow brings together Birth to Three contractors, preschool special education services from local school systems, preschool providers, child care providers, home visitors, and community service programs to share resources and coordinate services. HMG's **community outreach** component also monitors the availability of developmental services for young children, identifying service gaps and barriers that families experience and strategizing for solutions.

3. Using **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)**, Help Me Grow leadership addresses gaps in and barriers to accessing early childhood services through state level monitoring and collaboration with community and state level program leaders. The goal of Help Me Grow's CQI work is to ensure that **ALL** children for whom there are concerns are connected to appropriate services early, when we know services are most effective. This is only possible when we have mechanisms to ensure that children who do not qualify for Birth to Three (approximately 40% of children referred for evaluation each year), preschool special education or other intensive services can be connected to community-based developmental services, such as family centers, play groups and parent support opportunities.
4. The fourth and central component of Help Me Grow performs the important connection function. **Child Development Infoline (CDI)**, a specialized call center of the United Way's 211 information and referral system, fields more than 10,000 calls annually from parents, child health providers, child care providers, and others with concerns about children's development. Callers are connected to the best next service (e.g., assessment, Birth to Three, parenting support, local school district). Care coordinators at CDI make linkages across the array of services for young children and support families in accessing existing services.

Documented results of Help Me Grow's impact include the de-medicalization of developmental concerns, which yields cost savings in the estimated range of \$2,300 per child with developmental concerns. Evaluation also has shown increased reported self-efficacy for 75% of a sample of parents and caregivers using CDI and accessing services through the Help Me Grow network. The success of Help Me Grow in Connecticut has led to its replication in 26 other states and inclusion in several federally funded early childhood initiatives, such as Project Launch, Race to the Top, and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. **Continued funding for Help Me Grow ensures that Connecticut's early childhood efforts can be sustained across the many sectors that contribute to children's school readiness and life outcomes. Without Help Me Grow, other investments in early childhood will certainly be less efficient and effective.**

Thank you.

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